

The Berean Ecclesial News

A monthly magazine devoted wholly to the Berean Christadelphian Ecclesial welfare, with the object of providing Ecclesial news, exhortations, articles and information of fraternal interest to the Brotherhood. Upholding the Truth since 1923.

VOL. 4, NO. 5

MAY, 2001

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God Willing, The Berean Ecclesial News will be published monthly as an avenue of providing information of Ecclesial interest to the Brotherhood. Ecclesial news and correspondence, Fraternal Gathering notices, special activities and upbuilding exhortations are encouraged. This is an effort to upbuild and prepare us in heart and mind for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

CHRIST IS COMING SOON AND WILL REIGN ON EARTH

Ecclesial News

ODIADO, Kenya, Odiado Berean Christadelphian Ecclesia,
Bro. Humphreys Odaba Budedu, P.O. Box 142, Bumala, Kenya, East Africa

Dear Brethren and Sisters,

Greetings and lots of joy as we await the return of our Messiah in Our One True Faith,

Brethren's, we apologize for not having corresponded with you in good time but we sincerely appreciate the regards and concern that you extend to us in either way.

We have on two occasions received literature and tapes. They are good to us and we feel truly nourished with the contents. The latest we received were eleven tapes and seven books. Although the dispatch sheet reflected 8 (eight) books we only received seven. We suspect the confusion arose or the custom's who opened the package for verification. Maybe one of them wanted to get nearer to the "Truth" by reading the book.

All in all, we are very much thankful for both moral and spiritual support you have continued giving us. It is our prayers at the Odiado Ecclesia that our Almighty blesses you more and more as you struggle and deny yourselves to enrich the world with "The Truth."

Otherwise we are going on well and strong in the Ecclesia. We have continued registering more Brothers and Sisters into our One True Faith. We believe God is working within us and bringing in more friends to the Truth. Several of them have been drawn closer through lessons taught and listening to these tapes that you send to us. It is our prayer that God may avail ways and means of getting tape players to enable us to utilize the tapes more effectively by more members having opportunities for listening to them.

Lastly, may be something about the season. It is time for long rains. They have just started after a long spell of drought. Most people are in the process of ploughing and planting. May Almighty take care and bring forth what we struggle to plant.

We pray that we remain firm and always keep ourselves READY for the return of Our Lord. Thanks.

Yours in Christ,

Bro. Humphreys Odaba Budedu

FRATERNAL GATHERINGS & ACTIVITIES

(To be held God Willing)

- LAMPASAS FRATERNAL GATHERING**.....**June 8 - 10, 2001**
Bro. Rusty Stephen, HC3 Box 16A, Lampasas, TX 76550, 512-556-6771
- RICHARD FRATERNAL GATHERING****June 29 – July 2, 2001**
Bro. Ed Truelove, 2165 Douglas Ave., N.Battleford, Sask, Canada S9A 3N8, 306-445-3240
- HYE FRATERNAL GATHERING****July 23 - 29, 2001**
Bro. Curtis Hurst, Rt.1 Box 40, Mullin, TX 76864, 915-985-3868
- HOLLADAY FRATERNAL GATHERING**.....**October 6-7, 2001**
Bro. Warren Rankin, 699 White Tail Rd, Holladay, TN 38341, 901-584-3925

The Kingdom of God is Nigh at Hand

"When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower, and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat: and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right?" (Luke 12:54-57)

Beloved Brethren and Sisters, Sunday School Scholars, and Friends, that was Christ's discussion of the signs of the times with the people of his day. He told them they could discern the face of the skies: if a cloud came from the west from off the Mediterranean Sea, a shower would come. If the wind blew from the south, from up across Egypt, from across the Sinai Desert, it would be hot and dry. And it was so. They had that all figured out. Christ said to them, "What's wrong with you?" *"How is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right?"* From their own observations in the same kind of a rational way (by the light of reason in what they saw and heard with their own eyes and ears) they should have concluded then was the time of the Messiah's appearing, and that that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed he.

It didn't need any special sign, any special prophecy; Jesus told them to "just look around you." "You can figure out those other things logically and rationally – those other things that are so trivial – how was it you cannot understand the more important things?" And yet, they didn't have a clue. They were so caught up in what the weather was going to be "tomorrow", what they were going to be doing "tomorrow" (busy, busy lives) that they had no time for anything else. Have we fallen into that same trap? Can Christ's words in *anyway* describe **our** lives? 99

Jesus used a very simple parable in his discussion of the signs of the times. He said, *"Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors."* (Matt. 24:32-33) Christ, once again, calls their attention to a very simple aspect of nature they had figured out for themselves. The fig tree was so common (an everyday tree around Israel). When it started to bud, when it started to put forth leaves, they knew automatically and could tell with no special signs that winter was over and summer was nigh at hand. *"So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things know that it is near, even at the doors."*

There is no doubt that our Lord Jesus Christ will return personally, physically, and with power and great glory with all his holy angels to this earth. The question before us tonight is not IF Christ will return, but when?

We read in Acts chapter 3, *"And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."* (vs. 20-21)

"UNTIL THE RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS." Well, what's the "restitution of all things"? What is it that God had promised to restore? It is the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, with Jesus Christ as their king. Ever since the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948, we have had placarded before our eyes God's greatest physical evidence that He is at work, and that Christ is about to return. Many attempts have been made to calculate and suggest a date for his return. Scare tactics and dogmatism about specific dates have all proven unreliable. There is no substitute for sober and serious Bible reading. We believe we are living in what the Scriptures call "the last days". We need to take heed to the warning of the Lord, *"Therefore, be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."* *"Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is."* (Matt. 24:44; Mk. 13:33) And I believe it is for this very reason we cannot pinpoint the exact time of the Lord's return, so that we may always be watching and praying – ALWAYS.

The Pharisees were looking for a sign. They were seeking to interpret and receive signs. So much so, that they failed (completely failed) to recognize that Christ was amongst them. Therefore, tonight, as we look at these various signs, there is one important thing we cannot lose sight of; and that *is* to be ready ... always be ready at any time.

As we look at these signs, we must keep in mind that we are doing so at the backdrop of the restoration of the nation of Israel. We could point to 100 many times in the history of the world where there have been

decadent societies, and social problems, but never before in history have all these factors been operative together with the return of the Jew to his homeland. And we stress it again, because the existence of the other signs with the sign of Israel renders this age (in which we are living) very unique: VERY UNIQUE.

How does the world look in comparison to the Bible's description of the time of the end? First, we will look at the nations in general. In Joel 3 we read, *"Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the might men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up; Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong."* (vs. 9 and 10)

Now this says at the time of the end, the nations will be arming for war. They will be diverting into military expenditures moneys that should have been spent on other things, such as agricultural and farming. Have you ever seen one of those bumper stickers on the back of a car which reads, "We long for the day when the schools will have enough money for school books for the children and the government will have to hold bake sales for their bombs and missiles"?

Are signs like that strictly political signs for our politicians, or are they on those cars to cause us to think of what Joel said, to cause us to recognize the times we're living in, that Joel said this would be a sign of the end? Are we ready?

The quotation from Joel ends with, *"Let the weak say I am strong."* One would expect, as nations become stronger and stronger and more affluent, that they would swallow up the smaller nations. This is reasonable: this is what we have seen in history. This is the way it has always been. If we go back to Ninevah, Babylon, Rome, Greece (or even more recent history, the Ottoman Empire, the British Empire, the Soviet Union) we see the domino effect. You line up your dominoes, hit the first one, and pretty soon the whole row falls — one after the other. And so it has always been throughout history that as one nation became more powerful one nation after another fell under the other's dominion. But the Bible says it will be uniquely different at the time of the end.

Have you noticed what has happened to the powerful nations in the last thirty years? It is remarkable that since the last world war more and more nations have joined the United Nations formed just before W.W. II. We hear of small, insignificant nations taking their complaints to the U.N. We see the mighty nations (the U.S., Russia, and European nations) sitting around debating the cause of these weak, insignificant nations that years ago wouldn't have had any kind of say in anything. Can you imagine 101

a Rome, a Babylon, or a Ninevah taking into consideration the feeling and rights of other, smaller nations? Or giving them a place like the U.N. where they could bottleneck the big nations? It has not happened before in history. A Babylon or Rome would simply laugh at them. Today, we see the weak saying, "I am strong." The weak say, "Hey, you can't do that; that's not right; that's not fair to us smaller nations." And we see the big nations bottled up. Why is this happening now and never before in the earth's history? You know the answer as well as I. The only question we have here *is, are we ready?*

We are now living with a coalition of weak and strong nations. The resultant mixture of strong and weak nations is clearly indicated at the time of the end in Daniel's vision. *"And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay."* (Dan. 2:41-43)

The strong and weak nations sitting around a table discussing who can do what and when they can do it is what we have today. The weak standing up to the strong, and we have the resultant mixture "partly strong and partly broken."

It is the next two verses in Daniel 2 we want to focus upon: verse 44, *"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure."*

Do you know why we're seeing this state today? Because the Bible says that's the way it shall be at the time of the end.

If we look back at the last decade ... I can remember in the '80's the political seers speculating on what would happen during the decade of the 90's. They were all – 100%, universally – wrong. They were all totally unprepared for the astonishingly *swift* changes that swept over the earth. There were changes in Europe. The changes in Russia, the breakup of the 102 Soviet Union, the Berlin Wall came down – no one saw these things

102 happening. One expert compared these changes to playing a tape on fast forward. Things were going forward faster than anyone could plan or control, and no one knew where they would lead.

Not only are the nations unable to plan or control the political world, we find the economic world is also out of their control. As communications increase, the world becomes as one village. Young people (Europeans, Americans, Canadians, Japanese, etc.) all want the same name brand clothing, the same sneakers, the same sweaters. They all want to have the same video games, the same CD players. The globe is fast becoming a single market place. Goods are being made wherever they can be made the cheapest, regardless of national boundaries and political influence. The Internet (which no one foresaw, nor planned on) has sped it up far more than anyone thought.

How are they going to control this? How are they going to tax it? What will they do about buying and selling across borders? I can use the example of a car I bought a few years ago. It was supposed to be an "American" made car: a Pontiac. After I bought it, I found out it was designed in West Germany. If I bought the 1.6 liter engine, it was made in South Korea; the 2.0 liter engine was made in Austria. The automatic transmission was made partly in Canada, partly made in America. The manual trans-axle was made in France. The sheet metal came from Japan. The radio made in Singapore. The fuel pump was made in the U.S., the battery in South Korea, etc., etc., etc. This is just an example of companies without boundaries.

There is no place to hide as a global company buys and sells across borders. No government can control the many and varied aspects of this international market place. Just this spring, the U.S. Congress ratified "most favorite nation" status to the Republic of Red China. It is certainly not because they are one of our most favored nations with whom we want to do business. We probably couldn't find a nation more at odds with the U.S. than Red China, and yet, we issue the most favored status. Why? Because economic considerations trump political considerations. U.S. could not sit back to permit Europe and Japan to continue trading with Red China while we remained on the sidelines watching to see what would happen. It was a risk this nation could not afford to take.

What nation can tell a globe-spanning enterprise such as IBM, Shell, Mitsubishi where to locate its research facilities, or whether to expand or curtail its productions. NO company will take direction from political leaders. The global economy is fast becoming the emperor of the world. National boundaries are becoming like so many lines drawn on a 103

political map. If local conditions are not good, companies will move on. And 103 now we have multi-million dollar companies that exist only in cyber space – where ever that may be.

We now see Europe uniting as one nation. The single European market being constructed right now will have over three hundred twenty million prosperous consumers. It makes our world more commercial, as it grinds out its vast array of products to assuage the hungry appetite of citizens regardless of where they may live.

Eastern Europe and Russia are not blind to these things. They, too, cannot afford to sit back to allow the other countries trade while they remain on the sidelines. They, too, feel the economic and political need to become part. Russia is aggressively promoting the concept of a common European Homeland; a common European house with a reformed, more peaceful Soviet Union taking its place in the mainstream of European life.

It is not only Russia that is interested in building this common house. Pope John II calls Eastern Europe "that other lung of our common European homeland." He told the European parliament of his wish that "Europe may one day expand the dimensions bestowed upon it by geography, and above all by history."

The Pope was thinking of the Holy Roman Empire when the popes crowned emperors and kings. He was looking at the Holy Roman Empire. We look at the Image standing upon its feet: those feet partly strong, partly broken – the feet of iron and clay ready to be struck by the small stone and ground to powder.

This common European house, they are talking about, is being built without anyone controlling operations. I quote, "We are building a federal Europe, though we're not sure exactly what it is." Admits European Commission President Chief of Staff. "We are putting up the walls and bit and pieces of a house even though we don't have a blueprint of what it's supposed to look like when it's done." And the former Russian president said, "I am not claiming to carry a finished blueprint of that house in my pocket." He may not have the blueprint, but we do. It's right here, in the Bible.

There are several posters at the Counsel of European Headquarters. These posters are copied from a 1563 painting entitled: "The Building of the Tower of Babel". The poster shows Europeans happily and busily building what appears to be the Tower of Babel, and the title at the bottom 104 reads, "Europe: Many Languages, One Voice."

We read in the account of Genesis the people involved in the original unification enterprise. The poster accurately depicts what is happening today. In Daniel, the second chapter, we are shown what will happen to that enterprise. There are to be only four universal empires. At the end, the image will stand upright upon its feet with European/Asian nations uniting as one.

A few years ago, no political leader would have expected to see the changes we now see in the Soviet Union and Europe. But, the image must (and will) stand upon those feet of iron and clay with the weak saying, "I am strong", all against the backdrop of the Jewish people returning to their homeland.

Whatsoever the politicians expect it or not, it doesn't matter. It won't change things one bit. They didn't expect to see what they see today. The building will crumble, the image will be struck upon *its* feet, and it will be ground into powder.

In Revelation it says, "...*And there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.*" (Rev. 16:18) The earth will be shaken to its very foundation, the governments will come toppling down, and a new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness will be established upon it. Are you ready? You see these things happening just as well as I. What manner of people ought we to be?

I would like to look at two passages in which Christ gives very specific details about the time of the end. He says, "*For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*" (Matt. 24:38-39)

Now here, Christ spells out what the problems are; what we can look for before his return to the earth. "*For as it was in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage....*" Yeah, haven't they done that since the beginning of man upon the earth? What's wrong with that? What kind of a sign is that, anyway? How can that in anyway be a sign of the end? Well, let's look at the other passage.

It's found in Luke 17, and Christ gives a little more detail. He says, "*Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they budded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and 105*

destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." (Luke 17:28-30)

What was the problem? They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded. So what's wrong with that? **What's wrong with that?** Brethren and Sisters and Friends, look around you! What do you see before your very eyes? People busy. Busy people like never before in earth's history. Busy people running to and fro with their automobiles, their airlines, their private jets doing business all over the world, buying, selling, planting, building, eating, and drinking. Busy lives, busy all day and night as never before and getting busier and busier all the time. We can't get away from it. We have our beepers, our cell phones, our palm pilots, our lap tops. We can do business any place, any time. It doesn't matter where we are. Our lives are absolutely hectic.

We wake in the morning to an alarm clock. We jump out of bed, jump into the shower, get dressed, get the kids ready, pick up some breakfast, put it on the credit card, drop off the kids at day care and school, fight the traffic. The cell phone rings, and we argue with the spouse who will pick up the kids and who will take out the trash. We get to work and try to keep up with a hectic schedule. Too much to do, not enough time to do it in. We have a never satisfied boss. We fight the traffic back home. Beeper goes off ... call the office. Pick up the kids, grab some supper at some fast food place, put it on the credit card, get home, check the answering machine full of messages, and then we turn on the computer to answer our e-mail messages. **STOP! TIME OUT! WHAT ARE WE DOING?**

We have a problem! We have become part of the sick society we live in. People's lives have become more hectic today than ever before. People suffer from "busy sickness". You know that one out of six people have admitted becoming so angry with a co-worker, that they want to punch them?

Heavy work loads, technology bugs, job security worries, cranky colleagues.... One out of five Americans is affected by anxiety or stress mental disorder. **ONE OUT OF FIVE!** But that's not the worst of it. Here's the real shocker ... **SO IS ONE OUT OF TEN CHILDREN!** We see 5 year old children with stress ulcers. Suicide is the #2 killer of teenagers. What is **WRONG?** As Christ said, "Look around. What do you see? How come you can't figure this one out for yourselves?"

Something is dreadfully wrong. We have a problem. We have more, but have less time to enjoy the more things we have. We have more and are in more debt than ever before. The average American is between 106 twenty and thirty thousand dollars in debt on their credit cards alone.

A recent "Redbook" poll showed that 43% of working mothers described their lives as "frustrated". They are trying to juggle too many things and can't do it all, so they are frustrated. But you know what? There are 38% of the stay-at-home mothers who felt exactly the same.

What does that say about us? We are one of the richest nations on earth, but we are certainly not one of the most content, satisfied, or happy nations. Eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building – is that the sum total of our lives? Is that all we have time for? The people are lacking something. They are frustrated. The more they buy and sell, plant and build and go out to eat, the more frustrated they become. Jesus tells us THAT is a sign to look for. What are WE doing?

It's not only the mothers that have this problem. The fathers records are even worse. According to a recent report, twenty-seven million kids (39% of the population under 18) live at home without a "Dad"; approximately one-half of these have not seen their fathers in the last year. Fathers that stay at home don't receive much better grades, either. A goodly percentage of children who live with their fathers spend less than one hour per day with them. Can we expect children to relate to "Abba, Father"? Kids don't know their fathers, or only know him as a drunk that comes home to molest them, or beat their mother.

Do we spend "quality time" with our family? Have you bought into that "quality time" theory? Do you believe 10 minutes of "quality time" with a child prepares him for the 50 minutes of sitting alone on the couch? One woman said, "I used to knock myself out making sure we did all these wonderful things together; spent all this one on one time, when really what my kids wanted was to have me in the same room as them." Kids want you to "just be there", that knowledge that the parent is there gives them the feeling of comfort, of security, of protection, of safety, of love. In other words – "Abba, Father."

You know, when I give a talk, I rarely use an easel or a chalkboard, because I'm a terrible speller – always have been. But I see a chalkboard behind me, and there is one word I am confident I can spell. And so I'm going to write it up there. It's the word "LOVE". It's a word the children have taught me to spell. You know how a child spells the word LOVE? I'll write it for you... T-I-M-E.

Take time. Invest in your family. When we take more on in our lives, it's not only "us" that suffers. The children suffer, our families suffer, our spouses suffer, and the ecclesia suffers.

You know what Christ said about the days of Noah and the days of Lot. They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in 107

marriage (busy, busy, busy) until the day that Noah entered into the ark and "THEY KNEW NOT UNTIL THE FLOOD CAME AND TOOK THEM ALL AWAY, SO SHALL IT BE AT THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN." "They knew not". Just as in the day of Lot, and as in the days of Christ, they failed to see what was right in front of their eyes. They were more concerned about tomorrow's weather. They were too caught up in the eating and drinking, the planting and building, the buying and selling of every day life that they missed the important things. The important sign was right in front of their faces.

Are we too busy with our lives? It is the big sign that Christ said to watch for. It is the one that we can control and the one that will affect us the most.

The goal of society is to be successful. The goal for ourselves and our children is to be successful; but, success is not measured in dollars. I think we can look around and understand that clearly. Many of the most successful people are the most unhappy, dissatisfied people. Many of these movie stars that have everything this world can offer, have turned to drugs and other anti-social behaviors because they, too, are frustrated.

We must redefine our goals. Instead of striving for success as society around us, we must strive for significance in our lives. What is it that is important to us?

We have had many good talks this week, here at Hye. We're going to leave here tomorrow, to go back to our busy, busy world. How will these talks have affected us? What we should do is figure out what is significant to us, and then keep track of how much time we are spending on those things we felt were so significant. It is amazing how very little time we spend on what is truly important, and how much time we spend on what is totally irrelevant.

In a "U.S.A. Today" poll, most people wanted to slow down their lives. They said they'd sacrifice money to slow it down, to have more time for their families and friends. They are starved for connection with people, and yet, they can't accomplish it because the TV's, the radios, the Internet are always saying, "If you want to be happy get the latest clothes, the latest styles, the latest look, buy this car or that boat, take this vacation... etc., etc., etc." And so they have to work to achieve those things. Don't be satisfied, get this or that. They want to slow down, but they can't – they don't know how.

In 1969, I was drafted and inducted into the Conscientious Objector 108 "program" when I was sent to a hospital to do hospital work in lieu of

military service. My whole career has been centered around the ill, with death and dying. I've spoken to many, many people toward the end of their lives, and not one person ever said, "I wish I had spent more time at the office." You never hear that on the Hospice floor or the Oncology unit.

The problem we have is not diagnoses. The problem is a spiritual one: it can't be solved by getting more, doing more, or going more places. As was predicted of the time of the end, there would be a form of godliness, but without the power thereof.

It is as Solomon said, *"Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.... And behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit."* And this is brought out so clearly in our society today. There is a way that seems right unto man, but the end thereof is death. Christ told the people of his day that they needed to look around. They needed to see the obvious. Do we have the same problem?

All I can say is we need to wake up, but I believe Christ said it a little more eloquently, when he said, *"Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning. Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."* Bro. Jim Sommerville

DANIEL - THE VICTORY OF FAITH

Man's first estate is the natural and animal; his second, the spiritual, or incorruptible. To be exalted from the present to the future state and inheritance, he must be subjected to trial. From the examples recorded in the scriptures, it is evident, that God has established it as the rule of his grace; that is, the principle upon which He bestows His honours and rewards – to prove men before He exalts them. Probation, then, is the indispensable ordeal, to which every man is subjected in the providence of God, before he is accepted as 'fit for the Master's use.'" (2 Tim. 2:20,21) By these examples, also, it appears, that man's probation is made to bear upon the trial of his faith by testing his obedience. An untried faith is worth nothing; but a faith that stands the test of trial, "is much more precious than gold which perisheth, though it be tried with fire; " because the sustained trial will be 'found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearance of Jesus Christ."

(1 Peter 1:5-7) (Elpis Israel p74)

The third chapter of Daniel contains no reference to the man who is the central character of the book, and which bears his name. It is not Daniel, but the three companions who we were introduced to in chapter one who feature in the incidents recorded in this interesting and edifying chapter. We are not told where Daniel was when the great test of his friends' faith took place.

Nebuchadnezzar had made an enormous image of gold. The height was 60 cubits, and the breadth 6 cubits. Apart from the striking fact that this was certainly a large construction (90 feet high and 9 feet wide), we cannot miss the number "six" in the measurements. Six is the number of man, the number of flesh; and flesh is seen in all its pride in this chapter as it seeks to subvert the plan and purpose of God, and prevent His servants worshipping Him.

The building of this image of gold, following the details recorded in the second chapter, leads us to believe that Nebuchadnezzar, having grasped the meaning and significance of the "Image Dream", was determined to prevent *his* kingdom from being superseded by any other. Daniel had quite clearly indicated that the Head of Gold was the mighty kingdom of Babylon (Daniel 2:38). However, Nebuchadnezzar was told that despite the fact that "the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory" (Daniel 2:37) his kingdom would give way to another:

"And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee" (v. 39)

This was symbolized by the Breast and Arms of silver (the Medes and Persians), which in turn was followed by the Belly and Thighs of brass (Greece) etc. We are not told when this image in the plain of Dura was made (chapter 3:1), but it seems reasonable to assume that the events did chronologically follow the incidents of Daniel chapter 2. If that is the case, then Nebuchadnezzar was determined that his kingdom was going to continue! The symbolization of the Kingdom of Men was going to be gold — from head to foot! He seems to have clearly understood the significance of Daniel's exposition. He wanted his dominion to continue.

We cannot help wondering why Nebuchadnezzar tried to fight against God's revealed will! He had plainly declared after receiving the interpretation to his dream *"of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings"* (Daniel 2:47). Why then does he manifest such stubbornness at this time, and a ferocious spirit too? Even the fourth chapter reveals him having to be humbled because of his pride — even after 110 Daniel's warning! True, flesh often has to learn the hard way, and

then not straight away! However, here is someone prepared to execute the death penalty for disobeying his law.

It is perhaps difficult to realise the depth of pagan belief and tradition the nations were steeped in. Nebuchadnezzar was an idolater, and polytheistic. It was difficult for such a powerful monarch to become a humble servant of the God whom his conquered subjects worshipped. As we have commented in a previous article, to the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar, he had defeated Yahweh, the God of Israel in the conquest of Judah and Jerusalem, and the utter destruction of the Temple where Yahweh was worshipped. This success would have been attributed to his own gods. To his mind, Yahweh was just another god, but only on the same rank as his own! The interpretation of the "Image Dream" would be accepted at the time with amazement (and appreciation), but as time went on, the power of this miraculous revelation would wane. The apostle Paul wrote;

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."
(Romans 10:17)

Simply expressed, *faith cometh by hearing the Word of God*. This is not a magical process. It is a process involving much careful study and meditation of the Word of God. The miracles of Jesus during his three and a half years ministry, failed to instill in Israel, the faith which characterized Abraham as "the friend of God". The effects of the overwhelming display of power on Mount Carmel which Elijah hoped would "turn the hearts of the children to their fathers", were short lived. In fact, the report of that dramatic exhibition had absolutely no effect on the harlot Jezebel!

Nebuchadnezzar was not like Jezebel, of course. He is quite an interesting character as we read through the early chapters of Daniel, and by the time we reach the end of the fourth chapter, we begin to wonder what was Nebuchadnezzar's position before the God of Israel as far as the future is concerned.

However, with regards to his position in the chapter we are considering, unless he had continuously meditated upon the words of Daniel, and actively sought Yahweh, then he was unlikely to have been "transformed" by the "Image Dream". He was no doubt taken up with the daily affairs of his realm, and began to dwell on his mighty and powerful kingdom. He had (figuratively)"got up" from his prostrated position before the God of Israel (Daniel 2:46), and set about making others "fall down" before him — or at least before the image that "he" had made! (Daniel 3:5). This was typical of the autocratic absolutism of this "head of gold". He deferred to no one, and as a dictator, he expected obedience to his decree.

What was his decree? It was quite simple. A herald made the proclamation:

"To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up." (Daniel 3:4-5)

This was Nebuchadnezzar's project! The chapter makes this quite clear in the constant repetition of the fact that Nebuchadnezzar had "set up" this image (see verses 1,2,3,5,7,12,14,15,18).

What was the consequence of failing to obey this command? That was quite simple too!

"Whoso falleth not down and worshipping shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."

That was no idle threat. This mode of punishment had been inflicted upon some of the false prophets of Israel:

"Thus saith Yahweh Tzvaoth, the Elohim of Israel, of Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and of Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, which prophesy a lie unto you in my name; Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar; and he shall slay them before your eyes;

And of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which are in Babylon, saying, Yahweh make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire." (Jeremiah 29:21-22)

It is interesting to contrast the fate of these apostates, with Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. While the former perished in the flames, the latter "*Quenched the violence of fire*" through their faith (Hebrews 11:34).

But to return to the third chapter of Daniel, the decree having gone forth, compliance was expected. The Jews in Babylon would be in no doubt about whether they should comply with the command or not. The second of the ten Commandments was clear:

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I Yahweh thy Elohim am a jealous El, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." (Exodus 20:4-5)

No faithful Jew could bow before the Image which Nebuchadnezzar 112 has set up in the plain of Dura. Whether the Jews obeyed as a whole

we are not told. They may well have refused to bow down. It is recorded in verse 8 that "certain Chaldeans came near, and accused *the Jews*." This seems to refer to them as a whole. However, there was more to this accusation than just anti-Semitism. Three Jews in particular were the focus of irritation (chpt 3:12):

"There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

The "Chaldeans" were referred to in chapter one and verse four. They were the influential class in Babylon. The "wise men" of the day! It is quite possible that the elevation of Daniel and his three companions was at their expense! (see Daniel 2:48-49). At the very least, they would have despised these captives being promoted to such an important position, and now they had opportunity to redress the situation. Jealousy being the motive, not concern for the lack of adoration being shown towards the image, or Nebuchadnezzar's gods!

The result was per their calculations. Nebuchadnezzar was furious! (verse 13). He was also probably embarrassed that these three men who *he* had put in charge of the affairs of Babylon appeared to be flagrantly disobeying his decree. This could not be tolerated, and so they are summoned to his presence.

"Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?" (verse 14)

The Emphasised Bible renders this *"Is it with design?"* In other words, *is* this a deliberate act, or an oversight? He gives them an opportunity to explain themselves, and gives them another chance to conform. If they fall down and worship at the sound of the music, then all would be well. If not – they would be cast into a fiery furnace. This was characteristic of Nebuchadnezzar's temperament, as observed from Daniel's reference to him during the reign of Belshazzar:

"God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honournations, and languages, trembled and feared before him; whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down." (Dan. 5:18)

He then goes on to make a bold statement. *"....and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands"* (verse 15).

This is so typical of the empty boasts of men. Consider the words of Pharaoh, *"Who is Yahweh, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?"* (Exodus 5:2); or Rab-shakeh, *"Who are they among all the gods of 113*

the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand? " (2 Kings 18:35). Both of these proud men were to learn the might and power of the Creator, and see the works of their hands dashed in pieces before them. Nebuchadnezzar was also going to learn that Yahweh was the supreme God.

The response from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego was tremendous. Our familiarity with the account can tend to lessen the force of their great act of courage and faith:

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." (vs. 16-18)

The Jerusalem Bible renders verse 16 "Your question hardly requires an answer" (!) They didn't have to consider the options, or rationalise the position by considering *what harm there would be* etc. etc. The Commandments were clear, and there was only one course to follow, come what may. There is no indication that they expected a miraculous deliverance. They just stated what they believed. Yahweh would save them if it was in accordance with His purpose. They had no doubt about that. However, if it was not in accordance with His will, then they were prepared to accept that too. The bottom line was "they were not going to bow down to, or worship that idol even if it meant death". What great lessons there are for us in these incidents.

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." (Job 13:15)

"In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me." (Psalm 56:11)

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28)

Bro. Phillip Hughes

As Ye See The Day Approaching

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3)

Upon our immersion into Yahweh's anointed, we each entered into covenant relationship with The Eternal First Cause - creator and sustainer 114 of heaven and earth and all that in them are - The Almighty! Do we

understand what we have done? Do we truly realize the awesomeness of this most high/most holy being of glorious Spirit substance - having underived immortality and dwelling in light unapproachable? The words come to mind of Israel's marvelous deliverance from Egypt and their coming to Mt. Sinai and the answer they gave to Him who had called them.

"And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD." (Exodus 19:3-8)

We, as Israel, have been called of Yahweh with a holy calling - a call unto separateness (holiness) from the uncleanness that is in the world through lust. As we studied the Truth as it is in Jesus, we learned that we are commanded to *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (I John 2:15-17)*

We see that we are called with purpose of God unto holy service, as was Israel. We each, doubtless, realize that we have been called in love, mercy and grace unto a knowledge of the Truth *"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." (I Peter 2:9-10)*

Truth. Of our own selves, we could have never been worthy of the calling wherewith we have been called. God loved us while we were yet sinners, giving His only begotten son to be a propitiation for our sins. We had to learn, know, believe and be willing to obey what was

commanded us, (the Gospel which is the good news or glad tidings of the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ) coming unto God in and through Christ (by baptism) who for us became a covering. He remains that covering as long as we abide in the Father and in him. Peter speaks of those who fall away in his second epistle, thus: *"For if after they have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it has happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."* (2 Peter 2:20-22)

When we think of what covenant relationship means and involves, we should be comforted and greatly encouraged that we, through Yahweh's merciful provision have an advocate in heaven with the Father, even him who is our elder brother and high priest. He is the forerunner who has entered in beyond the veil (the most holy state - immortality), having won the victory over the law of sin and death in himself in the days of his mortality; through his love, faith and obedience to his Father's commands. He has opened the new and living way, first for himself and also for us if we abide faithful to an end, either our death or his second coming. Yahweh has invited us to the eternal glories and blessedness of all eternity. Eternal life - not as we know life at present - seeing as through a glass darkly, but then seeing and knowing even as we are known. Imagine perfect health for evermore! Try to imagine vivacity, exuberance and boundless energy from the source and giver of all good! Think of the felicity and exceeding great joy for ages without end! Try to think of what life will be like with no sadness or sorrow; no sickness, pain or suffering! Try to picture in the mind the abundance of wholesome, productive and truly profitable and pleasure-giving work we will do through eternity for Him who has called us from the vanity and emptiness of the way of death. Envision giving pleasure to Yahweh (The Eternal) and to his son, the predestined king of all the earth by the Father's fiat! Think of that kingdom which will never be destroyed or left to others. The kingdom will be the eternal inheritance of the righteous! Love, mercy, justice and truth will be the establishment of the throne of the Lord upon earth in Jerusalem. Those same attributes will uphold and maintain that throne. Christ will rule in the righteous precepts of Yahweh! The Holy, just and good law of the Lord will go forth from Jerusalem to earth's utmost bounds. Nations that 116 will not serve the Lord shall perish. Christ shall reign until the last

enemy is put under his feet - death. Then it shall be made manifest that He is accepted which did put all things under his feet, even Yahweh. Yahweh shall be (after Christ delivers up the kingdom to Him) the all things in all! Then, the beyond! If Paul saw in vision things that it was not lawful for a man to utter, what shall be in that limitless and vast expanse of time without end through all olahms (periods of time either hidden or revealed) and aions (ages)?

Let us each be a wise user of the time remaining to us in our probation and strive to learn as much as we can of the Father and the son. Life eternal is predicated upon this. Let us strive to learn as much as we can of His Holy Word of Truth. The counsel given the Laodiceans is: *"I counsel thee to buy from me gold which has been refined by fire that thou mayest be rich; and white garments that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness may not be apparent; and anoint thine eyes with salve that thou mayest see. Whomsoever I love I discipline and admonish; be zealous therefore, and change. Behold I have stood at the door, and I knock; if any one may hear my voice, and open the door, I will enter in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."* (Revelation 3:18-20)

In these last days it can be so easy for us to be caught off guard and be found of our master at his coming in the state of the Leodiceans of old. We must watch and "change" as mentioned in the scripture quoted above. Yahweh spoke to Israel (Psalm 81:10) *"I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it."*

Yahweh is "...Merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:6-7)

While we are weak and in constant temptation from within and without, we must be ever mindful and diligent to seek unto and stay close to our heavenly Father. *"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater So shall my word* 117

be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isaiah 55:6-11)

It is a divine guarantee that if we draw near unto God, He will draw near unto us. It is written of Yahweh in Isaiah 26:3: *"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."* Let us do these things that we may be able to escape the wrath that is about to come upon the children of disobedience.

Bro. David VanPelt

Let Us Never Surrender

It is better not to know the way of Truth at all, than, knowing it, to continue in the ways, works and maxims of the flesh. The saintship that is disfigured by a conformity to this God-forgetting, man-fearing, self-seeking, money-making, poor-neglecting, proud, unjust, merciless, impure, drunken, tobacco-stupefied age—is a saintship that will not be recognized by Christ, for Christ will recognize only the saintship of his own pattern, which is abundantly exhibited beforehand in the word of Truth. That saintship is a saintship of zeal for God, independence of man, faithfulness to Truth, purity (both of body and mind), righteousness, mercy, faith in God, love, meekness, gentleness, unselfishness, submission to evil, and kindness to the unfortunate—even if they are erring, fruitfulness in every good work, always abounding therein with thanksgiving, in the inextinguishable hope of the heavenly calling. This is the portrait drawn by the hand of the Spirit: the *"image"* exhibited for us to try and become conformed to.

We become conformed to it in *"the renewing of our minds,"* which is effected by the word abiding in us, and the word abides by being continually implanted in the reading and study of it. The mind is made of plastic material, and is being modified every day, for good or evil, according to the influences that play upon it. It is more easily affected for evil than for good, because its natural bent is in the direction of evil. Hence the battle is a hard one, and must be maintained to the last. Let us never surrender. Let us hold on to all the helps God has given us; let us avoid all the hindrances and the weights which so easily impede the journey and sink the steps in the mire of the devil's morass, that spreads far and wide on all sides around us. The day of victory will repay all exertion, for thus saith the Spirit;

"He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron."

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Be Kind To The Unthankful And The Evil

There is one commandment I should like to mention - a commandment having relation to many others, and one which Christ repeats several times and in various ways: *"Be kind to the unthankful and the evil"*; and which he also puts into another form:

"Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister...even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

And again,

"He that humbleth himself shall be exalted; but whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased "

In this he points to his own example, saying,

"If I, your Lord and Master, take such an attitude, much more may ye."

That is a distinct and imperative commandment—as much so as baptism; and the reason why it is necessary to emphasize it is, that we are so liable to overlook and act in opposition to it—it goes so much against the grain of the natural man. The commandments not to steal, not to lie, not to commit fornication, are such as a man's own sense of honour would help him to abide by: but to be kind to the unthankful and the evil is something opposed to all natural feeling, and contrary to the moral philosophy of the world. There is nothing more usual than to hear persons justifying unkindness on the ground that the object of it is unworthy. Some one is in need: the need is not denied, but it is said that the man is undeserving, and this is accepted as a reason why assistance should be refused. Some one asks a favour who has proved ungracious in former transactions, and this is made the ground of refusal. Some one is ill, who in health was savourless, useless, and perhaps hurtful; and goodness is denied on this ground.

A complaining widow is neglected because she refreshes not the soul. These things ought not so to be. We are in such matters to act from allegiance to Christ, and not from our own tastes. We are to minister because he has commanded us so to do, and not because it is sweet to do it. It is our discipline, and though oft-times bitter, sweetness will come even now from being kind to "the unthankful and the evil."

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What Does That Mean?

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."
(Matthew 18:10)

Last month we considered the question this verse raises concerning "children's angels" but this passage and Psalm 34:7 are also referred to in support of the idea that every individual has a particular 'guardian angel' that cares for him. Although we cannot "disprove" this concept, these verses do not prove the point either. They merely indicate that God employs the ministry of angels to deliver his people from affliction and danger. This is consistent with what we read in Hebrews 1:14 *"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"*

Although the Bible does not deal with the subject of angels specially, yet there are numerous incidental details that furnish us with ample information. God uses anywhere between one and many thousand of these superior beings to ensure the safety of his loved ones. *Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?"* (Matthew 26:53) A Roman legion consisted of six thousand soldiers, or more. This angelic host was available at the command of God, and He could have dispatched them at once if Christ had requested them. They are still available for any emergent occasion. What could such a company of 72,000 angels do, when a single angel slew an hundred, fourscore, and five thousand men, in one night? (2 Kings 19:35)

We see another example of angelic protection of a godly man, and once again it is not "a guardian angel" but a whole army. When the king of Syria attempted to take Elisha, we read: *"Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."* (2 Kings 6: 13-17)

Luke 15:10, *"Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."* We note that it is not just one angel that is watching and rejoicing, but many.

We therefore take comfort in the fact, not that we have a guardian angel, but that God employs the ministry of angels to deliver his people from affliction and danger. And the angels do not think it below their dignity to minister even to "little ones" among Christ's disciples. Thus we can rejoice with Paul in the knowledge that: *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31)

